

Ansley Standridge

WRIT 465

Professor Millis

Coastal Elite

21 September 2025

Install 01

Word Count: 1733

High Seas

The funeral was what Thomas expected. As the only direct family member, he was left to greet his father's vaguely familiar colleagues and so-called friends. All of them offered the same dry condolences, repeating some variation of how his father had made them wealthy or inspired a sense of adventure. He struggled not to scoff at the idea of his portly, bitter father inspiring adventure in anyone.

No, the funeral seemed to match his father's life well—a drab service in a stately cathedral. The only things out of place were the three men in the corner.

He'd noticed them halfway through, scowling by the door, and spent the better part of the hour searching his memory for their names. He waited for them to approach him afterward, but the men remained in their spot, whispering to each other.

“Hello, gentlemen,” Thomas said, finally approaching them as the guests filtered out. “Thank you for coming. I’m sure my father would have appreciated it.”

“Your father would have fled if he saw us.” The man in the center said, voice tinted with scorn. The two men flanking him *hmped* in agreement.

“I beg your pardon?”

“My name is Benjamin Taylor; this is Mr. Smith and Mr. Clarke,” the man said, gesturing to the others. “We were the ones to fund your father’s expeditions, and we’ve come to demand our payment.”

Sitting in his father’s—now *his* study—he felt the air sucked out of the room.

“£15,000? Why on Earth do I owe you all £15,000?”

“As I have already explained,” Mr. Taylor said, words clipped as he glared at Thomas. “We funded your father’s most recent voyage to the Caribbean. In the agreed-upon terms, our profit should have been £5,000 each, but your father stopped answering our letters.” He dropped into one of the extravagant velvet chairs with a scoff. “Imagine our outrage when we arrived. The bastard would rather die than pay what we’re owed. So yes, that debt now falls to you. We refuse to leave London without our pay.”

“You realize he barely included me in his business dealings, let alone his money. I don’t *have* £15,000.”

“Perhaps not in cash, but this house is worth nearly enough. I’m sure the courts would be willing to offer their opinion.” Thomas took a tense breath, rage caustic in his throat.

“I understand your frustration,” he began, taking a seat at the desk. “And of course, I’d prefer to solve this issue without the courts, but I don’t have £15,000 at the moment. The house is not an option.” Mr. Taylor opened his mouth, face contorted and reddening. Thomas didn’t

allow him to interrupt. “Give me three days, gentlemen, then we can meet again to discuss how to proceed.

“In the meantime,” he said with a smile, gesturing around the office. “Please take any of these items as a sign of good faith.”

Mr. Taylor stared through squinted eyes for a moment before slowly leaning forward to take a silver pocket watch from the desk. Sliding it into his coat, he stood and nodded.

“Three days. We’ll expect a solution, Mr. Wright.”

“You’re going on a treasure hunt? That’s the solution?”

“It’s the only solution, Richard. It’ll pay off the investors, save the house, and pay for tuition.” Thomas reclined into their usual tavern booth, the wood worn and comfortable.

“Besides, what better twist of fate than the old codger’s money paying for my ‘ridiculous’ science education in the end? Hell, the money’s enough to pay *both* our tuitions, and we’d be able to live in the house.”

Across the table, Thomas’s oldest friend looked over the letter again.

Thomas,

On my last voyage to Barbados one year ago, my health was failing, and I knew it was the beginning of the end. I withdrew the entirety of my fortune, hid it in the cargo, and ordered the crew to bury it on the island. It remains there now.

If there is any hope for you, you will sail yourself and retrieve it. It's time to abandon your ridiculous notion of a science degree and lecturing at that Institution. Become the man I tried to raise you to be. Do this, and know that you were ultimately worthy to be my son and inherit the company. Don't, and continue following your fleeting passions to poverty. The choice is yours.

Edwin Wright

“The bank confirmed he withdrew £75,000, Richard. The investors get their share, and we don't have to spend another moment penny-pinching. I'll quit bookkeeping, you'll quit serving here, and after four years, we'll be eligible for the Institution.”

The Royal Institution, where Thomas and Richard had met years ago. The pair had attended nearly every science lecture, ravenous to study it all. It remained their preferred haunt whenever they had a free moment.

“It sounds nice in theory, Thomas.” Richard's face softened. Thomas's chest tightened. “But what do you know about sailing? And what will you do when you run into pirates down there?”

“Look,” he said, leaning in. “I know the house is your last piece of your mother. And yes, I was looking forward to getting away from this awful tavern room. But we'll figure out something else.”

Thomas was on his feet within a blink. “There *isn't* anything else. They don't get her house, and that bastard doesn't get to win.” He wrenched his coat on and stomped to the door.

“Oh, come on, Thomas, don't do that,” Richard said, rushing out of the booth.

“That house is ours, Richard, and we're going to university. You can thank me when I return.”

“Thank you for meeting me again and thank you for your endless patience.”

Mr. Taylor sat in the same velvet chair, and though he painted an unimpressed expression, Thomas could see the curiosity behind his eyes.

“I'm sure you believe this situation is ridiculous,” Thomas said. “But I must admit that my father and I did not often see eye to eye, and it does not surprise me that he would do something so discreditable.

“Now, I know it's a large request, but it will lead to the most satisfactory solution for all parties. I'd like for you and the other investors to fund one more voyage. Allow for myself and a crew to retrieve his money, and I can guarantee your £15,000.”

Mr. Taylor stared at Thomas for what seemed to stretch on for an eternity. “£30,000.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“You expect us to fund yet another voyage out of what exactly? Trust? Kindness? I think not. We do it only *if* you guarantee us twice as much to cover the cost of two trips. Of course, I'll want your agreement in writing.”

The pair stared each other down. Biting down so hard his jaw ached, Thomas nodded.

Mr. Taylor's answering grin dripped venom. "You will have six months from the day you set sail to return with our money. If you do not, we'll go to the courts and take this house. You have three days to prepare for the journey. Hire a crew quickly, Mr. Wright."

Thomas stood, shaking Mr. Taylor's outstretched hand. "It's a deal, Mr. Taylor."

The *Jason* bobbed softly against the small waves at the dock. Despite never taking a real interest in his father's company, or sailing in general, Thomas had to admit the ship was a work of art. Its teak wood shone golden in the late afternoon sun.

"Your father sure knew how to keep a ship, sir."

Thomas jumped, turning to find an older man. His graying hair was cut close to his head, and his face was wrinkled with plenty of sunspots. Thomas grinned. "Captain Baker? It's so nice to see you! It's been quite a while."

"It's been longer than a while, Mr. Wright. The last time I saw you, you were barely up to my chest," Captain Baker said with a smile. He nodded toward the ship. "Are you planning to take over for your father? I was sorry to hear about his passing."

Thomas looked back over the *Jason*. "I'm planning a voyage. And please," he said, turning back to Captain Baker. "Call me Thomas."

"My trip will be a bit unorthodox." Thomas continued with a huff, explaining the last three days to the man. Captain Baker led many of Edwin's voyages when Thomas was a boy, and the old man had watched Thomas grow into a young man. On more than one occasion, Thomas wished he'd been born to the kind sailor.

Captain Baker let out a low whistle. “Forgive my saying it, Thomas, but your father could be a real bastard.” Thomas hummed in agreement and Captain Baker’s face turned contemplative. “Do you have a crew yet?”

“Honestly, I don’t even know where to begin.”

Captain Baker nodded. “Leave it to me.”

Thomas turned, wide-eyed, as the man continued. “Assuming you’ll have me. As Captain, I mean.”

“Are you sure?”

“I know enough solid men looking for a new voyage. I’ll have your crew ready in three days.”

On Sunday morning, the sun rose over a busy dock. Men moved all over the deck of the *Jason*, packing the provisions and maintenance supplies Mr. Taylor and the investors provided for the voyage.

“Thank you again for your trust and patience. The supplies, as well. While I apologize for the circumstances that led to our meeting, I look forward to meeting again upon our return,” Thomas said as the last of the supplies and crew boarded the ship.

“Of course,” Mr. Taylor replied. He held a letter out to Thomas. “This is for you, a bit of good luck. Be sure to open it only after the ship’s pushed off. Superstitions, and all.”

Thomas took it with a polite smile. While he never cared much for superstitions, he was loath to add to his and the investors’ contention. “Of course, Mr. Taylor. Now, if you all will excuse me,” he said, backing down the gangway.

From his place near the bow, Thomas could see the men still gathered on the dock. He pulled their letter from his pocket, waving it in their direction as the ship began moving.

One of your crew is ours. They're a skilled assassin and have been paid handsomely to ensure your return. Attempt to betray us, and they will kill you. See you in October.